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Prevention Summit on Child Maltreatment Moves Forward, Despite Winter Storms

KEARNEY - About 150 prevention professionals from across Nebraska braved snow and ice-covered roads to gather at the Younes Conference Center in Kearney today (4/10) to focus on strengthening local and state systems of prevention, designed to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect throughout the state.

Thomas Pristow, director of Children and Family Services, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, led the discussion on building a collaborative system that puts more resources toward preventing child maltreatment that often results in more children entering the child welfare system.

Pristow was joined by Scot Adams, DHHS director of the Division of Behavioral Health, on a panel to present plans for focusing on child safety by working across departments and building partnerships with communities.

"Our goal as a division is to be able to focus on the safety of our children and prevent the trauma caused by removing children from the home," said Pristow.

Nebraska has had one of the highest rates in the nation for removing children from their families. In the past year, DHHS has safely reduced the number of state wards by more than 700. Pristow and Adams emphasized their commitment to shifting more resources to prevention-based systems, and

mentioned proposals they are preparing for federal funds that would help increase Nebraska's statewide investment in prevention from \$2 million to over \$16 million.

Joining via teleconference were Kerry Winterer, DHHS CEO, and Dr. Roger Breed, Nebraska Commissioner of Education.

"This summit is about starting local conversations between organizations aimed at working together to improve the well-being of children across our state," Winterer told the summit. "We want DHHS to be a strong catalyst in helping organizations work together. One of my goals has been to find new and better ways for the divisions in DHHS to work together to accomplish our mission of helping people live better lives."

Jim Hmurovich, President and CEO of Prevent Child Abuse America, provided a national perspective on the need to clearly convey how everyone can be involved in prevention work.

"Nebraska is well positioned to make real progress with the leadership and commitment from the public and private partners who are coming together on this issue," said Hmurovich.

Juanita Blount-Clark, of the Center for Study of Social Policy/Strengthening Families, presented new strategies for strengthening Nebraska's families and communities that are used by national, state and local jurisdictions.

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About Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS): The Department of Health and Human Services provides important and, oftentimes, life-sustaining services to Nebraskans. Its mission, "Helping people live better lives," is the motivation to find ways to effectively provide these services and make a difference in the lives of the state's citizens.

About Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF): Created with funds given to states through the Family Preservation and Support Act, NCFF was founded in 1997 as Nebraska's solution for strengthening families so children can reach their full potential in life. Working with local, state and national partners, NCFF promotes prevention-based approaches in communities to nurture a child's healthy growth from cradle to career.

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